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Ben Bolt and Sweet Alice.

BY AMANDA M. DOUGLASS.

"Oh, don't you remember sweet Alice, Ben Bolt? Sweet Alice, whose hair was so brown—Who blushed with delight when you gave her a smile, And trembled with fear at your frown? In the old church-yard in the valley, Ben Bolt, In the corner secluded and lone, They have fitted a slab of granite so gray, And sweet Alice lies under the stone."

THOMAS DUNN ENGLISH.

Don't you remember? Are those three magic words—a key wherewith we may unlock the flood-gates of the heart, and send the sweet waters of the past over the plains and down the hills of that fair land, known in our heart experience as by-gone? Even so. There rises before us visions of a time when the bright deep eyes of the young Spring gazed shyly at us from beneath the ermined mantle, of Winter—when the blue violets stole their first tint from the bluer sky above; when the cowslips of sunny May, and the golden-hearted butter-cups first jeweled the slender blades of grass; and the hawthorn grew white with its blossoms; when we roamed the woods the whole of that long, warm, loveable June holiday, weaving garlands and listening to the concert of birds in that dark, mistletoe-wreathed oaken forest. The was one in years ago that prayed—"Lord keep my memory green," and the clinging tendrils of our hearts go ever back yearning to this prayer.

But green and fresh as the poet's prayer, had the heart of Ben Bolt been kept—from his early boyhood to the hour he sat by his old friend, and listened to the song of by-gone days. Not "through a glass, darkly," did he review those scenes of the past, but it was the going back of the boy-heart to other hearts of childhood.

There was the little old red school house, with its dusty windows, and desks that had been nicked many a time trying pen-knives; its tall, stern-looking teacher, whose heavy voice caused the younger ones to tremble; its rows of boys and girls, with their heads bent attentively downward to their books and slates. The wild Winter wind sang and whistled without, and though some few childish hearts tried to find words for its mournful notes, they were too young and happy to know that it carried desolation and heart-ache in its wail; yet did they learn it in after days.

Then there came a few light, round snow-balls, so tiny that it must have been the sport of the storm spirits in their eldritch revels—changing by and by to feathery flakes, that danced about ever so gaily. How the children's eyes grew bright as they looked at one another, and thought of the merry rides down hill, and the snow-balling that would make the play-ground ring again!—The last lessons were said, books and slates put aside, and in place of the silence, reigned gay and glad voices. Kate Ashley shook back her jetty ringlets, and laughed through her sparkling eyes, as she gave Jamie Marvin that bit of a curl he had so longed for, because she knew Jamie had the prettiest sled in the whole school. Ah, a bit of a coquette was the same gleeful, romping Kate; and there was Sophia Dale, looking as demure as a kitten walking from a pan of milk, and as playful as a kitten too, was she, in spite of her quiet looks; and the stately Elizabeth—queen Bess they called her, and I question if England's queen had a haughtier carriage;—but apart from those who were eagerly looking for friends to take them home, stood Alice May—sweet Alice. Very beautiful and lovely was she, with her winsome, childish face, blue eyes, and soft, brown curls. She was so delicate and fragile, you might almost fancy her a little snow child, or a lost fairy babe.

Nearly all the children had departed, amid the joyful shouts and jingling of bells, but yet the sweet little child stood alone, until a rich, boyish voice startled her by saying—"No one goes your way, Alice, do they?"

"No, I guess not, Ben," she replied, in her fine, bird-like tones.

"Well, the snow is too deep for you to walk, so I guess I will carry you home."

"O, no, I am too heavy to be carried so far," and she laughed low and sweetly.

"Heavy! no you're just like thistle-down, or a snow-flake, Alley; I could carry you to England and back again, without being at all fatigued," and he tossed the little girl in his arms.

"No, let me go; the boys will laugh at you, Ben," and she struggled.

"What do I care? they may laugh at Ben Bolt as much as they like," and the brave boy drew himself up proudly, and pushed the chestnut curls from his broad, fair forehead: "but I did not mean to frighten you, Alice," he continued, as he saw how the little girl trembled.

So she put on her bonnet and cloak, and Ben took her in his arms as if she had been a bird, while the little tiny thing nestled down on his shoulder, as he went stumbling through the snow, saying gay, pleasant things, that made the shy little girl laugh; and when, at length, he opened her mother's cottage door, he stood her on the floor saying—"There! Mrs. May, I brought Alice home, lest she should get buried in a snow-bank; she's such a weary little thing;" and before Mrs. May could thank him, he was out of sight.

What a brave, glorious, snow-storm it was though! The boys built a great snow-house, dipping the chunks of snow in water to harden them, so they might last longer; and they rolled large snow-balls for a pyramid, till it was higher than the school-house. They worked bravely, but the brightest face and pleasantest voice among them was Ben Bolt's. Such rides as they had down hill! and though the larger boys and girls said Alice May was too little and cowardly to join them, because she felt fearful sometimes, yet Ben Bolt held her in his arms, and away they went, merrily as any of the rest.

But the winter began to wane, and now and then a soft mild day would come that lessened the pyramid and snow-house materially. "Such a pity," they said, and wish winter would last away; but there was one little wren-like voice that prayed for violets and blue birds.

The pyramid tumbled down, the snow-house grew thinner and thinner, and the boys jested about its being in a decline, till one day it disappeared—faded away like so many of their childish hopes.

The glad spring came with its larks and daisies, and one delightful day the children went a Maying. Kate Ashley was queen, and a brilliant queen she was too, but Ben Bolt gathered white violets, and braided them in the soft curls of Alice, and told her she was sweeter, dearer than a thousand May queens like Kate. Child as she was, his words made the sunshine brighter, and lent enchantment to the atmosphere of her existence.

Then the long June days came, encircling the green earth with a coronal of roses, and making it redolent with perfume; and in the warm noontide hour the children strolled to the foot of the hill, and, clustering together, told over their childish hopes of the future. Some were lured by ambition; some dreamed of quiet country repose; but there was one whose eye kindled and young face flushed with enthusiasm, as he spoke of the sparkling blue waters, and the brave ships that breasted them so gallantly.

Ben Bolt was going to sea. Captain Shirley, a generous, whole-souled being as ever trod the deck, was to take him under his protection the next five years. There were exclamations of surprise and sorrow from the children; old haunts were visited, re-visited; they sat down in the shade of the old sycamore, and listened to the musical murmur of the brook, and the dreamy hum of "Appleton's mill;" exchanged keepsakes, and promised always to remember the merry, brave-hearted boy, whose home would be the wide blue ocean.

Alice May seldom joined them. She was

so delicate and timid, and the thought of Ben's departure filled her eyes with tears, so she would steal away alone, fearful of the ridicule of her hardier companions.

But one night Ben came to Mrs. May's cottage, to bid them good-bye. Alice stood by the window watching the stars, wondering what made them so dim—never thinking of the tears that dimmed her eyes, as Ben told over his hopes so joyfully. She could not part with him there, so she walked through the little door-yard, and stood beside the gate, looking like a golden-crowned angel in the yellow moonlight; and when he told her over again how large she would be on his return, that he would not dare to call her little Alice then; as he looked back lingeringly, she laid a soft brown curl in his hand, saying—"I have kept it for you this long, long time, Ben; ever since the day you brought me home through the snow—do you remember?"

He did remember, and with one passionate burst of grief, he pressed the little girl to his bosom, and the brave-hearted boy sobbed the farewell he could find no words for.

But five years are not always a life time. True, it was such to the quiet, thoughtful Charlie Allan, whose large dark eyes had stolen brilliancy from his books, and the laughing little Bel Archer—both were laid to sleep in the old church yard, where the night-stars shone on their graves. Others went out to seek a future in the gay world, and some grew into miniature men and women by their own sweet firesides; but Alice May seemed still a child. Yes, she was taller, and her slight form more gracefully developed; but there was the same angel looking through her eyes as had watched there in the olden days. She staid at home now, to assist her mother in sewing—their chief support; but she was the same shy, sweet Alice that Ben Bolt had carried through the snow.

Ben Bolt had come back. How strange that five years should have passed so quickly, and stranger still that this tall, handsome sailor, whose voice was so full and rich, should be Ben Bolt. Kate Ashley was not thinking of the sweet Sabbath rest, as the chime of the church bell floated through the village; there she stood before her mirror, arranging her shining curls, and fastening her dainty bonnet, with its white ribbons and dropping blue-bells, thinking if she could not fascinate Ben with her sparkling eyes,—it would be delightful to have his chief attention during his stay.

He thought she did look very beautiful, as he sat, before service, looking on the olden faces—but there was a fairer one than hers he fancied, as he saw the sweet face of Alice May, with the half-closed eyes, and long, golden-edged lashes, shadowing the pale cheeks. He carried in his bosom a curl like the one nestling so softly by her temple, and it was a talisman, keeping him from the enchantment of other eyes.

When the service was closed, Ben was thronged about by old familiar faces—they had so much to say, so many things to speak of, so much joy to express at his safe return, that it well nigh bewildered him. It was very pleasant to be so warmly welcomed by old friends, delightful to chat of by-gones; and it was indeed a Sabbath of joy to Ben Bolt.

Sweet Alice! Ah, how long and weary the time had been to her. Sometimes her heart died within her as she thought of the broad ocean; but when she looked so shyly at Ben that morn, and saw how handsome he had grown, a heart-sickness came over her, and the sunshine fell but dimly on the grass at her feet. She knew she had hidden away in the depths of her pure heart, a wild, earthly love, and she strove to put it from her, for would he think of her now? So it was no wonder she should slip her slender hand in her mother's and steal quietly from the joyous throng.

It was Sabbath eve—one of those balmy, moonlight evenings of the young summer;

Mrs. May had gone to visit a sick neighbor, and Alice sat by the window with the Bible open, and slender white fingers pointing to the words, falling so musically from her lips—

"And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever."

She looked tremblingly upward in the moonlight, for close beside her knelt the manly form of Ben Bolt. There was told a sweet story of love and hope, not the less sweet for being the language of every human heart, and the tiny hands of Alice were folded in his as she said, very low and sweetly—"If I live, Ben, when five years more have past, and you return a second time—"

She did not finish it—it was never finished.

So they plighted their troth that calm, holy Sabbath evening, and the buoyant heart of Ben, in its gushing sunniness, pictured radiant hopes for the future. He was young and so full of vitality—every pulse of his heart was beating gladly, and the coming five years were more precious to him than all the past.

"If we both live, Ben; God will have us in his holy keeping," she said in answer to his parting words; but as he pressed her convulsively to his beating heart, he replied—

"God will be merciful to us who love so dearly, Alice, darling."

She knew it, but she knew also that God did not always answer the prayer falling from the hopeful lips. Sweet Alice! Adown the future she looked tremblingly, and she saw the fragile form and spiritual face, with white lilies braided in the soft brown hair, her eyes grew dim with tears, for she knew not if it was a bridal or burial, for close beside the altar was the grave yard.

There were not wanting who wondered at Ben Bolt's choice, and thought it strange he should take Alice May in preference to the fairest and wealthiest. Some there were who held their heads loftily when they passed, but her heart was away on the blue waters, and she heeded it not.

How she watched the days in their passing. She noted how the Summer waned—how the fields of waving grain grew golden in the sunlight—she heard the glad voice of the reapers; and when the leaves were falling, the merry children went nut-gathering in the woods; then the noiseless snow fell, and lay on the hill sides as in olden days, until the genial spring-tide sun melted it away, and the violets and harebells dotted the fields—so passed a year.

She was growing fairer and more beautiful—too brilliant for anything earthly.—Once she knelt at the altar in the little church, and listened to the words uniting her with the Savior's redeemed on earth, but it was only in an outward form, for her heart had long been in the keeping of angels.—Again she watched the waning of the Summer days, and when the soft winds swept over the silvery rye fields, she thought of the ocean afar, with its broad waves. All through the Winter days she grew more spiritual in her beauty, and the slender white hands were often folded on her breast, as she prayed for those who would soon be left desolate; for she knew she was dying.

It did not startle her; she had felt long ago, that the fair green earth would hold her pulseless heart, ere it had left the cloister of girlhood. Life was sweet and beautiful, yet in her sinlessness, death had no agony, save her sorrow for those left in loneliness. It was only a very little way to the land of rest, and her feet had never grown weary; yet she longed to look once more upon the flowers, and have them braided in her hair; and so she lingered till the voice of Spring was heard on the hill-tops.

One morning when viewless hands were gathering back the misty curtains of the night, and the stars grew dim in the glory of early morn, sweet Alice stood on the thresh-